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ABSTRACT

Information about the French policy of government aid to private schools is presented in this report to promote understanding in the United States of the pluralist dilemma raised by the private school aid issue. An historical longitudinal policy evaluation involved document analysis and interviews with 16 French policy actors. The French policy is unlikely to serve as a model for American educational policy, although judged according to American criteria, the French policy was successful in that it provided free choice, was cost effective, and did not create segregation. However, cultural differences hindering implementation in the United States include the American perception of private schools' superiority, a political system based on separation of powers, and religious pluralism. A conclusion is that any unregulated program is politically dangerous because the private school aid issue is potentially divisive, raising the problem of autonomy and control; posing basic questions about the relationships among state, church, and family; and revealing inherent tensions among the democratic values of freedom, equality, and solidarity. An added factor in the United States is the racial issue. (53 references) (LMI)

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ONE APPROACH TO A PLURALIST DILEMMA: PRIVATE SCHOOL AID POLICY IN FRANCE, 1959-1985

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INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century many Western nations embarked on economic and political modernization. Economic modernization involved the development of industry, large cities, and transportation systems. Political modernization entailed the establishment of a legitimate constitutional order, the expansion of suffrage, and the development of governmental bureaucracy. These changes challenged tradition, threatening social instability. Searching for ways to ease modernization, many leaders advocated mass education. By the end of the century, most Western nations had established public school systems (Butts 1978).

It is not surprising that the development of public education provoked bitter struggles in many countries (Kaestle 1983; Prost 1968). By claiming the right to participate in the socialization of the young, the state was encroaching on territory that had long been reserved to other institutions, such as the family and the church. This conflict was a classic example of what political scientist Robert Dahl has called a "pluralist dilemma" (Dahl 1982). Pluralist dilemmas arise because modern nations contain many subsystems, including religious and kinship groups, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and social classes. Such subsystems usually have goals that they wish to pursue without government interference. They may wish to operate their own private schools and, if education is compulsory, to receive government subsidies for their educational programs.

Thus democratic nations face a dilemma. The democratic principle of freedom suggests the right of subsidiary groups to establish private schools. The democratic principles of equality and fraternity, or solidarity, suggest that the state should operate public schools in order to promote both equality among its citizens and national unity. Therefore, when Western nations established public schools, they were obliged to strike political compromises between private and public education. These compromises took various forms; but several governments, including those of the United States and France, decided in the nineteenth century that education would be compulsory and that public schools would be free and nonsectarian. Private schools could operate but would receive little or no direct public funding. In this century such policies have been attacked throughout the Western world and often discarded. Today the United States stands almost alone in its refusal to subsidize private education (Bruce 1983).

However, the issue has not lain dormant here. Since the 1930s Supreme Court decisions have upheld certain forms of aid to private schools (Hoffman 1974). In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act extended federal compensatory programs to children in public and private schools alike. Since then, the growing conservatism of the electorate has intensified efforts to change the traditional American policy (Heyns 1981). Many believe that the private school aid issue will remain on the

educational policy agenda for the rest of the century (Boyd and Kerchner 1987; Catterall 1984; T. James and Levin 1983).

In the absence of American experience with private school subsidies, many scholars have turned to the policies of other nations to learn how such programs can be structured and how they function. Yet the experience of France has remained largely unexplored. This gap in the literature is unfortunate, for France resembles the United States in several ways. It is a relatively large country with a heterogeneous population; until recently it pursued a private education policy similar to that of the United States; and it mandates the separation of church and state. Therefore, the French experience with government aid to private schools is relevant to Americans who seek a better understanding of the issue. They need access to information about it in the English language. It is the purpose of this study to provide such information.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The private school aid issue stems from two political conflicts. One is the inherent conflict between any state and the subsidiary groups that function within its territory. The second is characteristic of democratic states; a natural tension exists among the political values of freedom, equality, and fraternity, or solidarity. Recently Robert Dahl (1982), known for his theories of political pluralism, developed a theory of organizational pluralism. He argued that modern nation-states

contain diverse elements that give rise to autonomous organizations such as political parties, religious groups, and trade unions, posing a dilemma for democratic governments. They are desirable because they advance freedom and check governmental power. They are dangerous because they potentially threaten the national welfare and also because they may create social inequality, weaken civic consciousness, and gain excessive power over the state. Thus all modern democracies face Dahl's "pluralist dilemma" of autonomy versus control--the need to develop policies that give organizations some autonomy while maintaining adequate control over them. Implicit in Dahl's theory is a conflict between the principle of freedom, which promotes organizational autonomy, and the principles of equality and solidarity, which imply control of them. Iannaccone (1987) linked this conflict to educational policy, asserting that "ideas operate as the proximate driving force in American politics. . . and consequently in the politics of education" (p. 49). He identified these ideas as the three values derived from the French Revolution--freedom, equality, and fraternity--plus a fourth value. He called the fourth value "productivity," but others have called it "efficiency" (Kerchner and Boyd 1987). According to Iannaccone, the relative importance of these values changes cyclically throughout the Western world.

These theories suggest that the more pluralistic a society is, and the higher the relative value which it places on freedom, the more likely it is to permit the growth of a private education

sector. In a democratic society, however, the existence of private schools threatens equality and solidarity. As a result, democratic nations typically seek a balance between granting autonomy to private schools and controlling them when they develop private education policies. Since the relative importance of democratic values changes over time, democratic nations often find it difficult permanently to resolve the private school aid issue.

As one would expect, the American literature on the private school aid question focuses on the basic conflicts outlined above. Surprisingly, recent writers have accorded little attention to a major aspect of the first conflict: church-state relationships and the constitutionality of private school subsidies. They approach this issue cautiously, perhaps because the Supreme Court's position is in flux. Anthony (1987) suggested that the dissenting opinions of the 1980s were laying the groundwork for decisions in the 1990s that would find aid to parochial schools constitutional. McCarthy (1985) described the Court as alternating between the strict separation of church and state and the accommodation of religious groups. In recent decisions she detected a trend toward accommodation.

Perhaps because the constitutional issue is uncertain, most scholars have concentrated on developing arguments for and against subsidies to private schools, relying heavily on the four values that undergird educational policy. Not surprisingly, advocates of subsidies for private education base their position

on the importance of freedom. For some, religious freedom is the major issue (Vitullo-Martin and Cooper 1987). Others have argued that private schools play an essential role in maintaining intellectual freedom (Spring 1982). The freedom of association is central to Coleman and Hoffer's (1987) position. They argued that private schools are more effective than public ones because their homogeneity permits them to develop social capital through "functional communities with intergenerational closure" (p. 231). Neo-conservatives have argued for aid to private schools on the basis of the values of freedom and efficiency. In Capitalism and Freedom, Friedman (1962) advocated an unregulated, free-market voucher system, in which the government would inspect schools only to see that they met minimum standards. More recently, West (1982) and Chubb and Moe (1986) have advanced similar arguments.

Opponents of government aid to private schools concentrate upon the threat to equality and social solidarity which such a policy would pose. Fisher (1982) and Whitty (1984) contended that such a policy would increase both economic and social inequality. Olivas (1981) suggested that economic inequality would result because information about private schools would be less accessible to the poor than to the wealthy. Weeres (1987) based his opposition on solidarity, arguing that many of the current deficiencies of American education result from competition between local districts, segmenting American communities along class lines. Subsidizing private schools would increase divisiveness without improving educational achievement. Finally,

Apple (1982) suggested that a voucher plan would fragment those political organizations which seek to reform education. He concluded that "tax credits and voucher systems are contradictory" to meaningful change in American education (p. 534).

Several scholars have approached the problem of constructing a private school aid policy analytically. They believe that a sound policy would require balancing several values while safeguarding the integrity of both educational sectors. Doyle (1981) and Hirschoff (1985) emphasized their belief that a policy that protected both public and private education would almost have to include government regulation of subsidized private education. Murnane (1985) discussed the issues that would have to be addressed in an effective policy. Considering the central value conflict to be one between equal access and educational quality, he described the problem of the sorting mechanisms typical of each sector. The choice of a private school depends on parents' ability to pay and on the positive attributes of the child. Families which cannot pay tuition or whose children cannot obtain admission to private schools are sorted into public education. In Murnane's view careful regulation of sorting mechanisms would be crucial.

In conclusion, the American literature on the private school aid issue is large but has a major weakness. It is based on ideology rather than on empirical research. This weakness results from the fact that American governments have not subsidized private schools in modern times; as a result, comparative

studies in this area are valuable. They provide a much needed source of empirical data about how private school aid policies really work (Levy 1985).

METHODOLOGY

This study is an historical, longitudinal policy evaluation based on an approach developed by Coplin and O'Leary (1981). It answers four research questions about French private school aid policy between 1959 and 1985:

1. How did the policy environment, especially aspects of it relating to theories of pluralism, contribute to the development of private school aid policy?

2. How did the values of freedom, equality, solidarity, and efficiency contribute to the shaping of the policy?

3. What mechanisms were used to achieve policy goals?

4. What have been the effects of the policy on K-12 education in France?

The major research methodology was documentary analysis, using French primary source materials. Documents for possible use were selected according to the criteria for historical inquiry. They had to be materials produced by French nationals between 1959 and 1985 and had to have been written close to the time of the events. From this population of documents, a manageable sample was selected, using two criteria. The sample had to represent different classes of data and a range of political opinions. One major source selected was Journal Officiel, published by the French Parliament. From it, five parliamentary debates and all the private school legislation passed between

1959 and 1985 were selected. Other sources included two Paris newspapers of different political orientations, and several statistical, economic, and demographic reports. Finally, fourteen scholarly books and fifty-seven scholarly articles were selected for analysis.

Before beginning data collection, the researcher wrote a statement of personal bias to increase her awareness of her own opinions so that she could guard more efficiently against biased data collection and analysis. In the first stage of analysis, she reduced the data by summarizing them in English. In the second stage of analysis, she studied different classes of data in different ways. She analyzed legislation, using a content analysis form based on the literature review. She analyzed the other sources thematically, identifying the values behind the policy and its effects on education. While conducting these analyses, she developed a chronology of the period to use in interpreting the data.

Elite interviewing supplemented the major methodology. In May and June 1989, the researcher interviewed sixteen French policy actors in Paris, using a semi-structured interview guide in French. The interviewees represented thirteen organizations involved in policy development. They included spokespersons of both private and public school groups. The researcher took notes during each interview and expanded them within twenty-four hours. The expanded notes were analyzed thematically.

In interpreting the data, the researcher set up twelve folders based on the four research questions and three chronological periods. She determined the organizing principles to use in writing each section of the research report. Then she organized the reduced data, developing a code so that she could easily retrieve data. She read all the reduced data, listing in code the items that related to each organizing principle, and filed these lists in the folders. In writing the report, she retrieved the data for each section, re-read them, compared them, and interpreted them before writing the related section of the research report.

FINDINGS

Conservative Policy, 1959-1981

Policy is not developed in a vacuum. It arises from the social conditions that undergird the political process. Therefore, in analyzing the 1959 Debré Act--the French law which first granted large-scale subsidies to private schools--one must begin with an examination of the prevailing sociopolitical conditions.

The central political characteristic of the policy environment in 1959 was the erosion of the legitimacy of the French state, largely because of France's invasion, defeat, and occupation during World War II (Méjan 1960). As Dahl's theory would predict, this loss of legitimacy encouraged several social subsystems to revolt. The result was colonial war abroad and political instability at home. In this context one religious

subsystem--the Catholic Church--began to pressure the government to subsidize its private schools. The Church's action was motivated not only by the state's weakness, but also by a financial crisis in Catholic schools. In 1951 the government implemented a small voucher plan, but this did not satisfy the Church. The issue remained salient throughout the 1960s, contributing to political instability (Méjan 1960).

The political situation was compounded by a baby boom that had resulted from rapid post-war economic growth. Between 1946 and 1966, the school age population increased by 42% (Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques [INSEE] 1980). French leaders were acutely aware of the implications of such growth for educational spending. Thus political instability, a financial crisis in Catholic schools, and great population growth combined to create a problem that demanded a solution.

In 1959, Charles De Gaulle came to power determined to resolve the issue; for it was dividing the country politically. Private school supporters and the traditionalist Right advocated a large-scale voucher plan with minimal government regulation; in contrast, the largest public school lobbying group argued that private education should be abolished. Both groups exerted intense pressure on the government. Throughout 1959 Prime Minister Michel Debré stated clearly that the government's concern was national solidarity and that he would seek a compromise to establish that solidarity. He skillfully exploited the resources of the parliamentary system to produce a compromise

bill and gain its passage by Parliament in December 1959 (Coutrot 1963).

The 1959 parliamentary debate took the form that Dahl's theory would predict. It turned on the values of freedom and solidarity as well as the related issues of the autonomy and control of private schools. The traditionalist Right argued that parents had a right to choose their children's schools and that the government should support that right financially. The Left concentrated on children's freedom of conscience and the social solidarity which public education creates. In contrast to both groups, Debré and his supporters advocated a carefully controlled financial aid plan, saying plainly that "the pre-eminent place of the public school system is not and cannot be open for discussion" (Journal Officiel: Assemblée Nationale: Débats [JOD] 1959, 3637).[1] Although the legislators did not emphasize the demographic situation, other sources suggested that the government decided to subsidize private schools because that was the most cost-effective way to educate the baby boom generation (Fontaine 1978; Tanguy 1972). Thus the major values behind the Debré Act were freedom, solidarity, and efficiency.

The Debré Act was promulgated on December 31, 1959, and completed by nineteen decrees between 1960 and 1965 (Journal Officiel: Lois et Décrets [JOL] 1960-1965). The new policy attempted to balance several political values while protecting the dominant

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[1] All citations from French documents were translated by the author.

position of public education. It affirmed the freedom of private groups to operate schools and their right to receive public funds for the services that they rendered to the nation. It simultaneously affirmed the government's obligation to regulate such subsidized programs. Private schools were offered four options. First, they could maintain the status quo, receiving little aid and remaining free of regulation. Second, they could sign a "simple contract" with the government. Under it they would offer "public instruction" in some or all their classes; the government would pay teachers' salaries and regulate the schools moderately. Third, private schools could select a "contract of association," under which they would offer public instruction by government-paid teachers, as under the simple contract. However, the government also would pay their operating costs. In return, they would be heavily regulated. Schools which signed contracts had to guarantee equal access to "all children," regardless of "origin, opinion, or belief" (JOL 1960, 66). As a fourth option, private schools could choose to join the public school system.

Several policy mechanisms protected public education, whose centrality was emphasized in the preamble to the law. The decision to contract with schools for instruction rather than pay vouchers to parents was the major means of achieving this goal. In addition, several policy provisions made it impossible for private schools to receive more tax money per pupil than public ones did. For example, private school teachers were paid on the public school salary schedule and had to work the same number of

hours as public school teachers; and class sizes in the two sectors had to be comparable. Local governments could help fund private schools, but under no circumstances could they give them more money than they gave to public ones.

Moreover, the policy limited the capacity of private education to expand. No school could apply for a contract unless it had operated for at least five years and already possessed "appropriate" facilities; nor would the government subsidize capital outlay. This meant that private schools had to charge fees, restricting demand. Finally, schools that sought subsidies had to demonstrate that their services were needed.

Some aspects of the policy were designed to preserve a degree of autonomy in those private schools which entered into contracts with the government. Article I of the Debré Act explicitly affirmed the idea that subsidized private schools should be able to maintain their "distinctive character". The decrees which followed gave private schools the right to offer religious courses which were not covered by the contract--and whose teachers were not compensated by the government. In addition, private school principals were granted more power over their schools than principals in the public sector enjoyed. Significantly, although the government paid the salaries of most of the teachers in schools under contract, it did <u>not</u> pay administrators' salaries. One representative of a private school group elaborated on this point in an interview on June 1, 1989:

> What helps us maintain our distinctive character is the fact that although teachers are paid by the government, principals are not. Neither principals nor other administrators. It seems important to me not to place management under government supervision.

By 1962, the policy had been clearly delineated; it was not substantially modified until changes in the sociopolitical environment caused the issue to become controversial again. A major factor in the changed environment was the student riots of May 1968, which both undermined the De Gaulle presidency and raised questions about French public schools. In 1973 an oil crisis caused the French economy to slow down and unemployment to rise (L'Année Politique [L'A.P.] 1968-1974). Moreover, during the 1970s both French public schools and French society were becoming more pluralistic. In 1975 the Haby Act made coeducation mandatory in all public schools and abolished ability grouping through the tenth grade, making it impossible for families to find traditional sex-and class-segregated education within the public sector (Ballion 1982). At the same time racism was becoming a problem. By 1973 immigrants made up 7.2% of the French population; many had North African origins and were Moslems. As unemployment rose, racial incidents became more frequent (INSEE 1960-1975; L'A.P. 1973-1981).

In their interviews French educational leaders linked racism to private school aid policy. One man stated: "There is a connection between the immigrant problem and the fact that many parents insist on the right to choose their children's schools." Another provided a reason: "Parents want to send their children

to school with other little French children where only French is spoken." A representative of the Catholic system concurred, saying: "Some parents choose private education because there are so many foreigners in the public schools. It's disgraceful!"

It was in this context that the political situation began to change. On the one hand, the Left became increasingly powerful; on the other, neo-conservatives became influential within the government. The political values of neo-conservatism were apparent in the 1971 debate of the Pompidou Act, which extended and modified the Debré Act. In their speeches, neo-conservative legislators praised private schools for their flexibility while criticizing public ones for rigidity. They advocated more autonomy for private schools and sweeping reforms that would decentralize public education (JOD 1971). They also emphasized the importance of parental choice. One proclaimed: "We live in a democracy, and we're proud of it. No democracy without choice, no choice without pluralism!" (JOD 1971, 1473). It is not surprising, then, that throughout the decade French private school aid policy was in flux. The basic structure of the Debré Act remained intact, but it was modified by two laws, twenty-four decrees, and a Constitutional Council decision (JOL 1970-1981). An analysis of these changes revealed that almost all fell into one of five categories: (1) weakened restrictions on the growth of the supply of private education; (2) increased operating flexibility in private schools; (3) increased power for private school administrators; (4) increased funding for private schools;

and (5) equalization of the employment conditions of private and public school teachers. By the time the Left came to power in 1981, private school aid policy had changed significantly.

Effects of Conservative Policy, 1959-1981

Ultimately, policies are not judged on the basis of the values behind them or the elegance of the mechanisms devised to realize those values. Ultimately, policies are judged on the basis of their effects, intended and unintended. It is necessary, then, to turn to the question of the effects of the private school aid policy which French conservatives developed in 1959 and pursued until 1981, when France elected a Socialist president. The first effect which one must always consider in analyzing any policy is its implementation. All the evidence suggests that the Debré Act was implemented slowly and with difficulty, but that it was implemented. The difficulties were not financial. Parliament provided funding to support the program; in 1961, the national education budget increased by 9.2%. This jump was followed by a 14.8% increase in 1962, a 19.1% increase in 1963, and a 26.7% increase in 1964 (L'A.P. 1963). The difficult implementation was caused by the unwillingness and inability of many in both private and public education to put the policy into effect quickly. However, by the end of the 1967-1968 school year, 95% of the students enrolled in Catholic elementary schools and 91% of those enrolled in Catholic secondary schools attended institutions under contract to the government (L'Ecole catholique demain 1969). Since the great majority of French private schools

are Catholic, this meant that a large proportion of private education had come under the Debré Act.

Many Americans are concerned that subsidizing private education would cause public school enrollments to drop. Yet the percentage of French school children enrolled in public education did not fall between 1960 and 1980. After a modest decline in the early 1960s, public school enrollment rose slightly--to 84%--and remained stable throughout the period (INSEE 1961-1981). French policy actors attributed this equilibrium to the structure of the policy.

Although a detailed analysis of the financial effects of the policy would go beyond the scope of this investigation, it is necessary to consider them. The French source material contains several interpretations of how much the program cost. Supporters of the policy generally argued that it saved tax-payers money since the percentage of children attending private schools was higher than the percentage of the education budget allocated to private schools. Opponents typically responded that such an analysis failed to account for administrative and overhead costs (Cornec and Bouchareissas 1982). Although the evidence is conflicting, it suggests that the policy probably did save money during its first ten or fifteen years. However, as the regulation of private schools loosened during the 1970s, these savings diminished and may have vanished. Some evidence suggests that by 1981 private education cost the government more per pupil than did public education (Khaldi 1985).

In addition, people in both political camps described financial effects of another sort; they claimed that the policy made sound budgeting and accounting practices difficult. It was hard to predict from year to year how many schools would sign contracts; and the government lacked control over how many private school teachers were hired, although it paid them (Le Monde (21 December 1970; Savary 1985). Local governments resented having to contribute financial support to private schools without having input into their contracts. A number of law suits resulted (Leclerc 1985).

In examining any policy issue, one must consider what is missing from the evidence. In the case of the financial impact of French private school aid policy, much is missing. One looks in vain for well documented comparative statistics on per pupil expenditure, funding trends, overhead costs, transportation expenses, and many other items. They do not appear in the sources; what does appear are hints that the government was not reporting all the facts (Cogniot 1974; JOD 1984). Given the volatility of the issue, it is easy to understand why the French government may have chosen not to report complete comparative data on the two educational sectors. Yet this omission means that one major effect of the policy may have been its impact on government reporting of school finance statistics.

In the United States many people oppose government aid to private education because they fear that such a policy would promote segregation. In France, too, the danger of segregation

has been a concern. Traditionally, French education was segregated in three ways: by religion, by sex, and by social class. Recently, racial segregation has also become a concern (Gohau 1978). The effects of the policy on segregation have been mixed. By equalizing access to private Catholic schools, the Debré Act reduced religious segregation in French education (Savary 1985). Many private schools are coeducational, but--unlike public ones--they can still practice sex-segregation (Fontaine 1978). Thus, the policy maintains sex-segregated education as an option for French families. In France, private education has always been elitist, enrolling a disproportionate percentage of upper and middle class children. By subsidizing private education, the Debré Act made it possible for some families in modest circumstances to choose private education. However, since private schools can charge fees, private education has retained an elitist character. Finally, public schools enroll a disproportionately high percentage of foreign children (JOD 1984). This problem surfaced late in the period; in the future much of the conflict over the policy may focus on this issue.

One purpose of the policy was to create domestic consensus on the issue. There is little doubt that public attitudes toward private school subsidies changed considerably during the period under study. Although regular, consistent polling data are not available, the general outline of the change can be traced. In 1960, only about half the French population favored subsidizing private schools; by the mid-1970s almost 80% did (Savary 1985).

Much of this change resulted from the growing consumerism of French society and the subsequent belief by French parents that they should be able to exercise choice in education as in other areas (Ballion 1982). Since French public schools are rigorous and more highly respected academically than private ones, this choice often represents a desire for an "escape hatch" for children who have trouble in the public system (Ballion 1982).

The evidence suggests that while the policy has had no profound effects on public education, it has changed French private schools by causing them to become more like public ones. Organizational effects have been especially strong; a wide range of sources from both sectors agreed that under the Debré Act French private education became more centralized and more bureaucratic. This development resulted from regularly dealing with government agencies. As one spokesman for the Catholic system expressed it in his interview: "Quite simply, we had to get better organized. Organization was essential."

Finally, the policy has affected the teaching force in both sectors. It encouraged defensiveness among public school teachers. In both newspaper articles and interviews, public school representatives expressed their resentment of the privileges accorded to private schools--especially their right to select their students. In the private sector, the right of schools to maintain their "distinctive character" led to many life-style and freedom of conscience controversies between teachers and administrators. By the 1980s portions of the public and private school

teaching forces were cooperating to seek reform of the policy (Khaldi 1985).

Attempts at Policy Reform, 1981-1985

In 1981 the Socialists came to power, having won both the presidency and the lower house of Parliament. They were elected on a platform that included a plank calling for reform of the private school aid policy. This plank was of vital importance to part of their political base: public school teachers and their unions. In terms of Dahl's theory, the policy environment was not conducive to such a reform: government legitimacy was not particularly high, the economy was sluggish, and cultural pluralism was perceived as threatening. Moreover, public opinion overwhelmingly supported the status quo. Even so, the government sought to reform the policy.

From 1982 to 1984 Minister of National Education Alain Savary conducted the lengthy negotiations between "social partners" that typify French neo-corporatist policymaking (Theen and Wilson 1986). He managed to produce a bill, but by 1983 the political process was breaking down, with both sides staging demonstrations against the project. The political situation was complicated since the issue not only divided the Right from the Left but also split major interest groups on both sides (Leclerc 1985; Savary 1985). The bill that finally emerged represented an attempt to set up an almost completely new structure within which subsidized private education would operate. In essence it repealed the neo-conservative legislation of the 1970s and all

the Debré Act except a few paragraphs. The Savary Bill did accept the principle that the government should subsidize private schools; in exchange it greatly tightened government control over them (Leclerc 1985; Savary 1985).

In May 1984 the National Assembly debated the bill. Speakers for both the Right and the Left concentrated on the political value of freedom: their concepts differed strikingly. The Right based its position on an economic metaphor, conceiving of schools as products which consumers select in an educational marketplace. To them educational freedom meant the right of parents to choose a school that offered an educational program with which they felt comfortable. In contrast, the Left advocated a concept of educational freedom that was political. They conceded the importance of freedom, but argued that freedom had to be carefully balanced against the other political values. Moreover, they believed that several freedoms had to be maintained in schools. Parents had the right to make some choices, but the freedoms of children, teachers, and local governments also had to be considered. An appropriate balance could be achieved only through government control (JOD 1984).

The Left held a majority of the seats in the National Assembly, so the bill passed. Its passage provoked waves of angry protest across France, illustrating the truth of an opinion which Charles Vial had expressed in the September 30, 1983, issue of Le Monde:

> The private school aid issue plunges too deeply into the national unconscious, it stirs up too much that is both rational and irrational, for us to be able to deal with it without risking the release of uncontrollable forces. (p. 1)

In July 1984 President Mitterrand abruptly withdrew the Savary Bill from Parliament, announcing that a new bill would be developed. Over the next months a second reform of the policy was negotiated. It was ultimately incorporated in the Chevènement Act, Article 119 of the Finance Act for 1985, and several decrees (JOL 1984 and 1985). In essence the new legislation represented a return to the original Debré Act of 1959, with the addition of tighter financial controls. For example, Article 119 of the Finance Act for 1985 stipulated the precise conditions under which private schools could sign new contracts. Under the Debré Act, private education leaders had been free to expand existing schools or start new ones before they approached the government for contracts. Under the new policy of "restrictive funding," this practice ended; and private education was included in the educational planning process along with public education. Moreover, in allocating funds government officials were to consider "the specific constraints imposed on public schools because of the existence of special demographic, social, or linguistic conditions" (JOL 1984, 4078). The effect of the new funding regulations was to limit the capacity of private education to expand. After years of conflict, then, the government managed only to obtain a policy that subjects private education to slightly more control than did the Debré Act. Given the

nature of French public opinion, this return to the status quo ante probably represented a major victory--one which only skilled political players could have achieved.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

If one uses the criteria which emerge from the American debate over private school subsidies to evaluate the French policy, one must judge it relatively successful. It provided French families with a measure of choice in education. At the same time it protected the integrity of the public school system. Under it private school enrollments did not rise disproportionately; nor did social segregation markedly increase. The sorting and creaming process which some Americans fear did not occur. Moreover, throughout most of the 1959-1985 period, it was probably cost-effective. The evidence suggests that this success resulted from the design of the policy, which carefully balanced competing values in order to protect public education. This approach entailed considerable government regulation.

It is probably because of the apparent success of the French policy that some Americans have mentioned it approvingly and held it up as a model for the United States (Friedman 1962; Healey 1970). Yet the findings of this study suggest that it might be difficult to develop and implement a version of the Debré Act in this country. The French policy context differs from the American in at least three significant ways. First, in France public education is considered academically superior to private; in the

United States the reverse is true. This difference alone would probably make it more difficult for Americans to protect the integrity of public education than it was for the French.

In addition, French political institutions differ from American ones. France uses a form of parliamentary government and a system of neo-corporatist interest representation. Some American political scientists believe that such institutions make it easier to pass carefully balanced legislation than does the American system of separation of powers and competing interest groups (Dahl 1982; Theen and Wilson 1986). Even with the advantages of the French system at his disposal, Debré found it difficult to obtain passage of his carefully balanced bill in 1959. It would probably be far more difficult to obtain the passage of similar legislation by any American lawmaking body.

Finally, French religious pluralism differs from that of the United States. Although France has several influential religious minorities, one church clearly dominates the religious life of the country and runs almost all its private schools. As a result, the French government had the advantage of dealing with only one important religious policy actor as it developed, implemented, and reformed its policy. In the United States neither the Federal government nor any state government would have such an advantage. They would have to deal with several religious groups, none of which was clearly dominant. A complex competition between religious groups would surely develop, and it would

require delicate handling. Its outcome would be unpredictable and precarious. This is a problem which the French did not face.

In reality, however, Americans are unlikely to develop a policy similar to the Debré Act. In Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971), the U.S. Supreme Court made it difficult for American governments to regulate sectarian private schools. As a result, most recent policy proposals have called for relatively unregulated voucher plans. The findings of this study suggest that any unregulated program would be politically dangerous because in a pluralistic society the private school aid issue is a divisive, even an explosive political issue.

In France this issue contributed to the instability of the government in the 1950s, was a major issue in the 1970s, and brought the nation to a high level of political conflict in 1984. The issue did more than set the Right against the Left; it also caused internal divisions within interest groups and political parties. The theoretical framework used in this study suggests why. The private school aid controversy raises the problem of autonomy and control, posing basic questions about the proper relationships between the state, the church, and the family. It also reveals the inherent tensions among the democratic values of freedom, equality, and solidarity. Moreover, it touches upon such sensitive subjects as children, religion, ideology, education, race, social class, and cultural identity. In short, it touches things that are central to what it means to be human.

For all these reasons the issue is divisive. Intelligent, well-meaning people can and do hold different opinions about these matters; and they are likely to feel strongly about their opinions. Thus when the issue becomes politically important, it provokes powerful reactions. It is also likely to be exploited by politicians. In such a situation orderly political processes may be severely disrupted. That is, of course, exactly what happened in France in 1984. It was only with great difficulty that the French were able to contain and resolve that conflict. Therefore, all serious American discussions of aid to private schools should address two related questions. How much conflict would such a policy arouse in the United States? And how easily could American institutions contain and resolve that conflict? All serious American discussions also should squarely face the race issue; the French evidence suggests that it can play an important role even in a country that lacks a history of racial segregation. In all likelihood any American private school aid policy--regulated or unregulated--would arouse conflicts colored by racial suspicion and hatred. The French experience suggests that Americans should carefully weigh the advantages of greater educational freedom against the disadvantages of disrupting orderly political processes.

In conclusion, this investigation supports the value of studying the private school aid programs of other nations. Such research can deepen Americans' understanding of the pluralist dilemma which the private school aid issue raises. It can also

deepen Americans' understanding of how our own society both resembles and differs from the societies of other Western democracies. Ultimately, all democratic nations face the same dilemma. They must resolve the autonomy and control problem posed by private education so that they simultaneously maintain the values of freedom, equality, solidarity, and efficiency. However, each democratic nation must solve the problem within the framework of its own constitution, culture, and traditions. As a result, different countries will adopt different policies to achieve the same end. As Americans we must learn to understand our own unique circumstances. In the long term, only such understanding can enable us to deal effectively with the pluralist dilemma which private education poses.

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